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SUBJECT: (C-AL9-01941) LEADERSHIP PROFILE: BARBADOS PM
DAVID THOMPSON

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires D. Brent Hardt, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Barbados Prime Minister David Thompson is a bland but competent leader who is maintaining his country's long-standing tradition of political pragmatism and fiscal responsibility. He is also committed to an independent foreign policy of "moderation and commonsense." This commitment, reflected in the oft quoted statement of Barbados' first Prime Minister that it is "friends of all, satellites of none," lends itself to a cautious, middle of the road approach in international fora. But that same fierce independence has also made Barbados an impressive bulwark against attempts by Venezuela to encroach politically on the CARICOM space. End Summary.

Thompson's DLP: A Difference With Little Distinction

12. (C) Following fourteen years of Barbados Labour Party (BLP) rule, David Thompson's Democratic Labour Party (DLP) won a landslide victory in January 2008, securing 20 out of 30 parliamentary seats. As the island nation's sixth PM, Thompson has led a generally competent if uninspiring cabinet that has piloted the country through rough economic waters with reasonably good marks. The most distinctive policy of Thompson's government has been its firm stance on curbing -- and even reversing -- illegal immigration and his party's desire to protect employment for Barbadians. In most other issues, from macro-economics to security and law enforcement to foreign relations, Thompson's DLP looks very much like the previous government. This bi-partisan continuity in domestic and foreign affairs has been one of the bulwarks of Barbados' political stability and economic growth.

13. (C) Regionally, Thompson has continued to pay lip service to regional integration, though his government's policies have reflected a cooler attitude toward regionalism. His immigration policies have angered the "have-nots" in CARICOM, notably Guyana, and have inspired copycat policies from Antigua. The global economic downturn has led to an "every man for himself" approach in which Thompson went to bat passionately with the U.S. over Tax Haven legislation as it pertained to Barbados, but with little regards for the impact on CARICOM neighbors in a similar boat. Thompson's government has had something of a rapprochement with Trinidad following a souring of relations between the two countries (largely because of personality clashes rather than substantive differences, we are told).

14. (C) Barbados remains deeply suspicious of Venezuela and wants no part of PetroCaribe or ALBA. Barbados has a running conflict with Venezuela, tense at times, over a maritime border dispute that has impinged upon Barbados' efforts to

sell oil and gas exploration rights on the seabed in what it believes is part of its EEZ. Barbados, with among the highest per capita GDPs in the hemisphere, does not need Chavez's money and does not trust his motivations in the region. While the "friends to all, satellites of none" mantra has made Barbados an often difficult partner, in the case of Venezuela it is making this island nation a stalwart against Venezuelan political encroachment.

15. (C) Barbados, one of the first countries in the Caribbean to recognize Cuba in 1972, has long enjoyed friendly relations with the Castro regime under the mantra that Cuba is part of the Caribbean. While Thompson and his Foreign Ministry recognize Cuba's democracy deficit and human right shortcomings, they have never been willing to criticize Cuba publicly. Thompson has sought to deepen ties with China, making a week-long visit there in 2008. His Foreign Ministry is also planning on expanding diplomatic representation to include a resident Ambassador in China and Cuba, as well as a non-resident Ambassador for Brazil.

A Trustworthy, if Prickly, Ally

16. (C) The U.S. has a strong, and strong-willed, friend in Thompson and in his government. This was in evidence during the 2009 Summit of the Americas, when Barbados hosted U.S. military support aircraft and held a reception in honor of the strong military-to-military relationship. He and his government have been similarly forthcoming and cooperative on a range of security issues, most recently serving as one of the strongest supporters of our nascent Caribbean Basin

Security Initiative (CBSI) and routinely proving helpful to NOAA in its mission to study hurricane impacts. At the same time, Thompson continues Barbados' aversion to being seen as too close a friend of the U.S. and has rebuffed appeals for closer cooperation on UN human rights issues. More than any other country in the Eastern Caribbean, Barbados can be counted on to act from a clearly articulated sense of pragmatic national interest devoid of ideology and grandstanding.
HARDT